

Fighting Goliath:

Policy Advocacy Strategies of Nonprofits
Facing Corporate Interests on Climate Change

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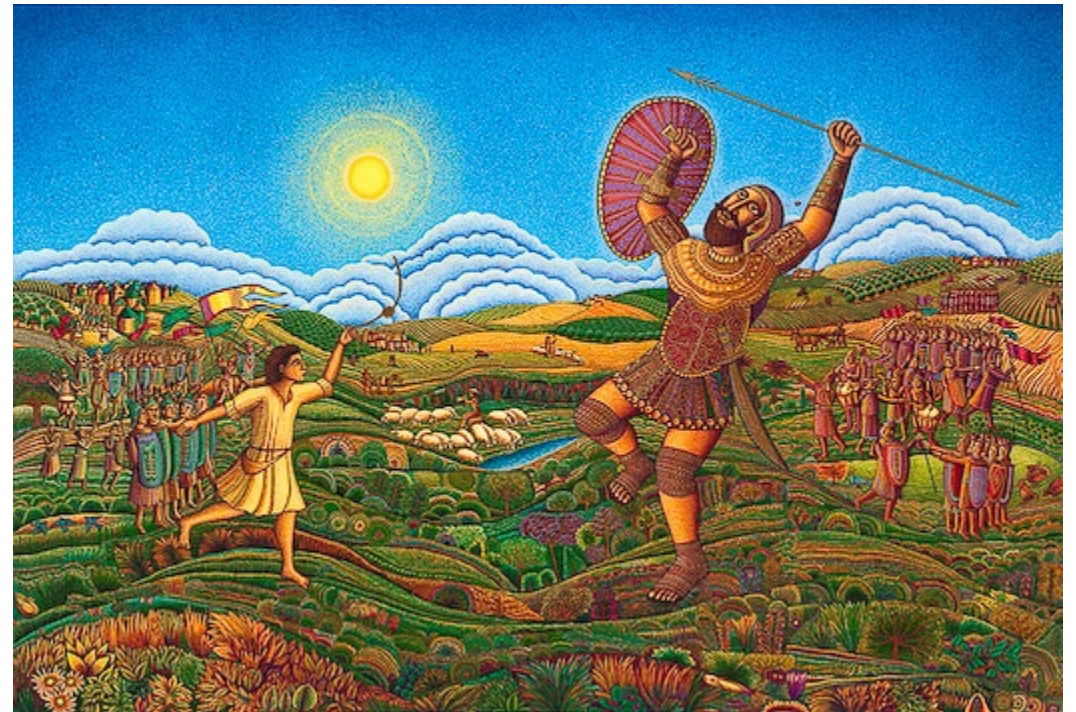
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Power in policy conflicts

- Those in power versus those who want power (Pralle, 2006)
- Environmental interests often face corporate power
 - **Often resembles David and Goliath:**
 - Classic zero-sum situations
 - Apparent lopsided advantage of Goliaths
 - The Davids sometimes win
 - (Not in issues of sustainability)
- *What advocacy tactics and strategies are used by environmental nonprofits battling large corporate interests?*



David and Goliath, 2005, by John August Swanson

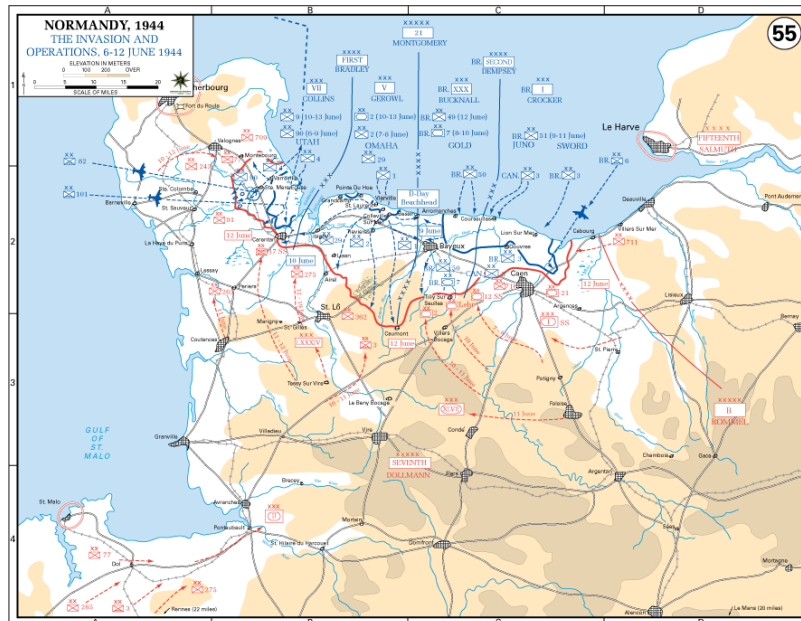
Deconstructing the conflicts

- Competitions in...
 - ...**values** for environment: anthropocentric individualism v. anthropo-/bio-centric holism
 - ...**power** to influence formal policy makers: industry v. environmental nonprofit
- Blatant imbalance of *traditional* power
 - Historic inertia of anthropocentric dominion over nature (Kline, 2007) results in contemporary uneven playing field
 - Economically and historically established corporate power versus younger environmental interests
 - Kamieniecki's (2006) study of over 1000 environmental policies
 - Vast majority had no business opposition or business siding with environmental policy, perhaps signaling post-materialism (Inglehart, 1981), business dominance, or careful venue shopping?
 - Still, 4% to 8% of environmental policies in his study were clearly opposed by business
- *Misunderstanding of advantages and disadvantages in these fights? (Gladwell, 2013)*

Deconstructing the conflicts

Tactics

- specific advocacy activities with specific, near-term, intended objectives



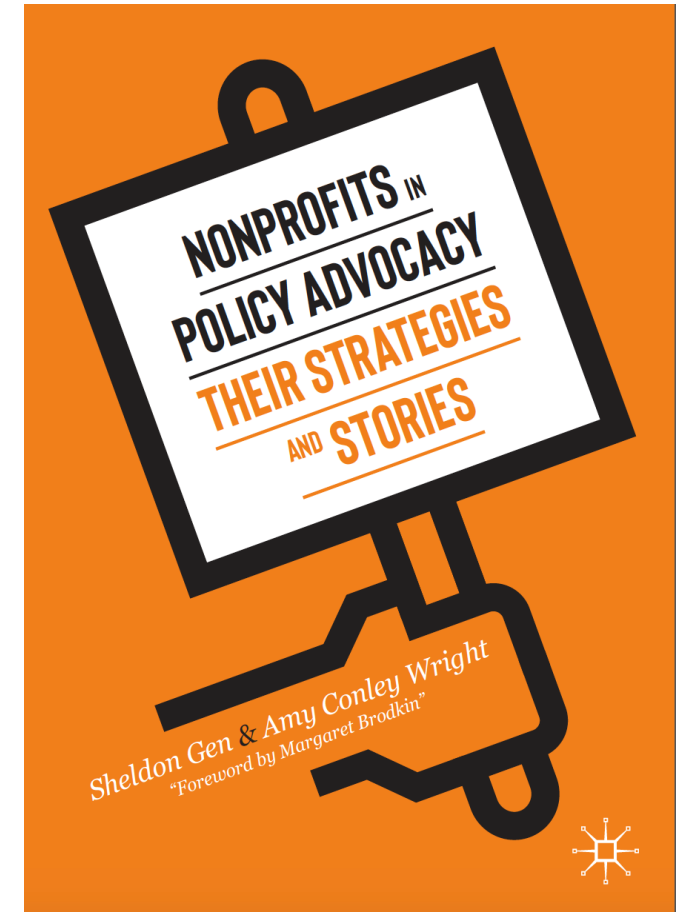
Strategies

- large-scale, long-term plan of tactics to achieve intended outcome

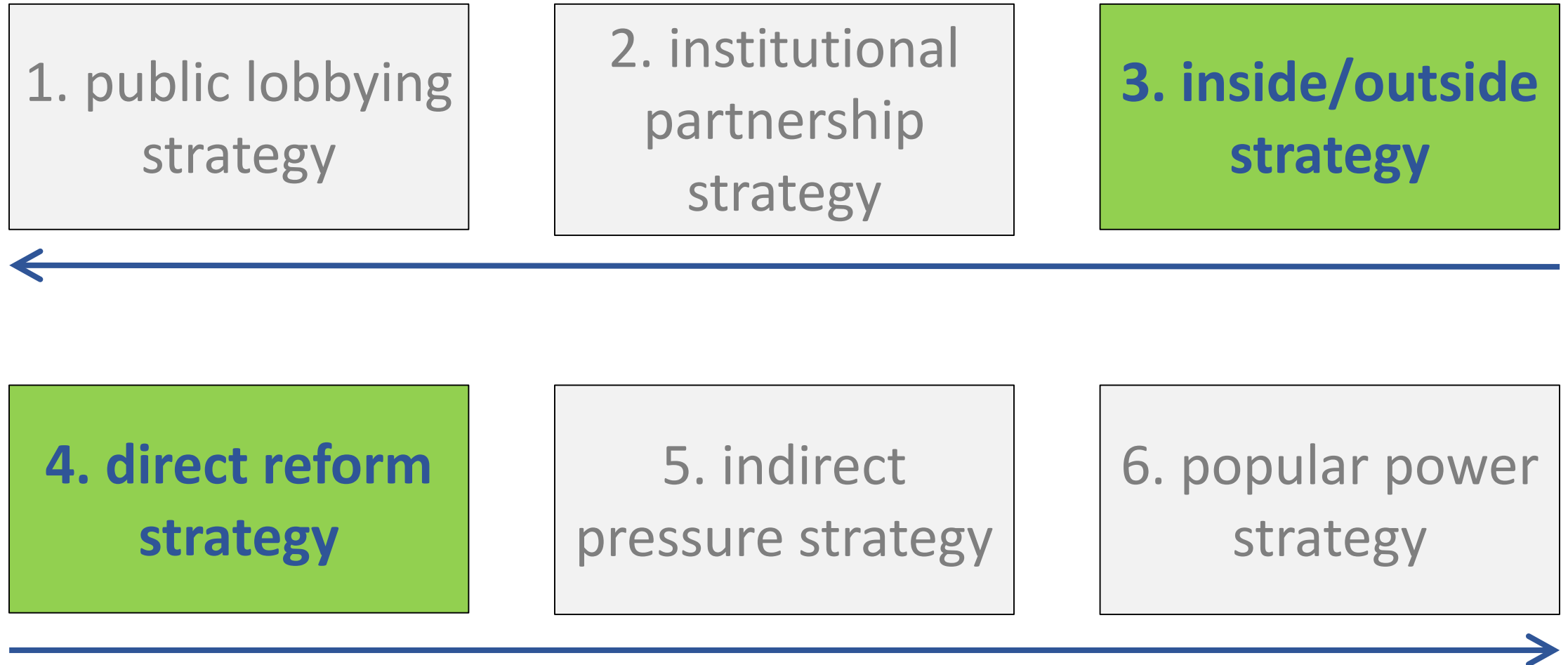


Methods

- Drawn from a larger project centered on 32 case studies of policy advocacy (Gen & Wright, 2020)
 - Interviews with policy advocacy directors
 - Q-sort exercise (Q-methodology)
 - Media audits
 - Survey of 800+ nonprofits
 - Wide variety of policy issues
- Subset of 7 cases involving some environmental concerns
 - **Subset of 4 cases of nonprofit Davids fighting corporate Goliaths, including 3 on climate change issues**
 - **Goliaths: Clear, organized corporate opposition with overwhelming advantage of one kind (\$)**
 - **Davids: Relatively disadvantaged on \$, but can win**
 - **Zero-sum game**



Findings: 2 of 6 strategies used



Inside/outside strategy

(Messaging, media work, rebuttals) + (lobbying, coalitions) → policy makers' views → policy change

- Inside prong: nurture relationship with one (or small group) policy champion inside the decision making body (legislative or administrative), for them to sway their peers
- Outside prong: information campaign and media work to build public pressure on policy makers
- Together, these two prongs create “window of opportunity” for policy change
- Combines both sides of Walker’s (1991) dichotomy of strategies
- Supplements Kingdon’s (1984) streams theory with activity assignments

American Lung Association of California v. oil industry:

It helps to have a villain.

- Campaign goal: California Air Resources Board adopt the “Advanced Clean Cars Regulation,” to minimize greenhouse gas emissions from cars by promoting alternative fuels.
- Strategy and tactics
 - Inside: lobbied specific Air Board members and their staff
 - Outside: physician testimonies in varied media, letter writing campaign, highlighting who the opposition is (oil company)

“It is always helpful when you have a big, bad opponent... to generate a lot more public interest and support” – campaign director



American Lung Association of California v. tobacco industry

- Campaign goal: 2012 voter initiative to raise state tobacco tax by \$1/pack to fund cancer research and a tobacco control program
- Strategy and tactics
 - Inside: ALA themselves as the inside champion of the initiative process
 - Outside: coalition of public health partners, public debate against tobacco doctors, signature gathering
- Opposition outspent ALA-CA \$60M to \$12M
- Tax proposal lost by slim margin in a June ballot (Presidential primary election, with Democratic incumbent). They tried again in a November general election and won.



Direct reform strategy

(litigation or monitoring) + information campaign → policy change

→ improved social/physical conditions

- Bypass legislative processes; aims at judicial and administrative process to affect change: litigation, monitoring, or demonstration projects
 - Adversarial legalism (Kagan 1991, 1998)
 - Incrementalism (Lindblom 1959)
- Information campaigns to build public awareness and support (Linsky 1988)

EIP v. coal industry:

In court, the playing field is levelled



- Campaign goal: close down every coal-fired power plant in the U.S.
- Tactics:
 - “Impact litigation”: the pursuit of policy change through the court system for large numbers of people, such as through class action lawsuits.
 - Litigation to tighten regulations on coal-fired power plants, making their continued operation unprofitable.
- ***“Litigation, policy analysis, and media outreach”*** are the key activities of their advocacy campaigns, said Eric Schaeffer, the founder of EIP.
- Public outreach with plaintiff, the Sierra Club...



Sierra Club v. coal industry:

They have money, we have boots on the ground

- Tactics: membership activation, public outreach

“The way you influence public policy is you basically have the power of money and you have the power of people,” explained the policy director. *“We are never going to match [the opposition’s] money, so we invest heavily on the people side... We have a grassroots army—boots on the ground—2.3 million members and supporters that are joining [us] and committed to working on policy change.”*



Discussion

- Reconsidering advantages and disadvantages of environmental nonprofits
 - Advantages gained by those in power (e.g., corporate interests) are only advantages from the view of the social structures and institutions that allowed them to gain power.
 - In a different context (e.g., environmental policy battles), those same advantages can be moot.
 - Environmental nonprofits' powers aren't in money, but in people, resonate messages, legal leverage

“Giants are not what we think they are. The same qualities that appear to give them strength are often the sources of great weakness”
(Gladwell, 2013)